sThe King stood for a moment raising his hands and eyes to Heaven and praying in silence, then slipped off his cloak and lay down with his neck on the block. The executioner bent down to make sure that his hair was not in the way, and Charles, thinking that he was preparing to strike, said, “Stay for the sign.”

“I will, an’it please Your Majesty,” said the executioner.

A fearful silence had now fallen on the little knot of people on the scaffold, on the surrounding troops, and on the crowd. Within a few seconds the King stretched out his hands and the executioner on the instant and at one blow severed his head from his body.

A boy of seventeen, standing a long way off in the throng, saw the axe fall. He would remember as long as he lived the sound that broke from the crowd, “such a groan as I never heard before, and desire as I may never hear again”.

Some of the guards and a few of the more determined and dextrous spectators had managed to dip handkerchiefs in the King’s blood, or even to scrape up fragments of earth from below the scaffold or tear off pieces of the blood-soaked pall, but the King’s body had been reverently carried back into the palace, where it was placed in a coffin and taken to the room where it was to be embalmed.

from C.V.Wedgwood, *The Trial of Charles I*, 1964. Writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Wedgwood's distinctive narrative style made her work on the Civil War very popular.